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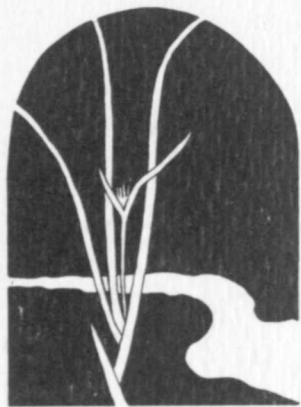


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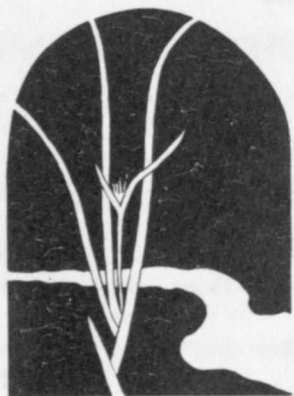


riverSedge

a journal of
art poetry and
prose from the
lower rio grande
valley of texas

vol. 1

no. 3



riverSedge

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BARRY DEMPSTER

TRANSFORMATIONS

They're all murmuring,
purling like rivers --
the wives blowing up balloons,
the husbands with seeds hanging out of their
pockets,
the babies strung on telephone lines.

They're all whispering, launching
words, questions-up, in the sky --
the girl wielding the knife once stuck in
her belly,
the boy afraid of dark holes, of falling,
both of them trapped in a defective bed.

And no-one knows what they're saying,
whether sounds string into sentences, whether
brains are really transmitting or,
could be, blocked by the changes
piled up like chairs.

What a life, this transformation
that doesn't touch the way we look, taste,
only our feelings flipped and snapped shut:
perhaps somewhere in a small town
there's a lively lady in raptures
over tall trees, her man
diving through their branches.

BARBARA F. LEFCOWITZ

FOUR WOMEN IN A FRAME

(From a Painting by Rose Abrahamson)

THE MOTHER:

I am the dancer
who made an early bow.
I took the essential steps
then slipped behind the wings
to become the chronic choreographer
of others' pirouettes & pas-de-deux.
Sometimes in the splintered dark
between performances
I feel I must leap
this stunted hall, thrust
a new stage with rusted nails
from theaters boarded-up
but still not bulldozed--
Yet I am always there
for the morning's curtain-rise,
I have an incurable craze
for watching the swirl to its final taper,
have trained myself to be content
with the sound of one hand clapping.

THE ARTIST:

I live inside my own dance.
My skin is lined with mirrors, outside & in.
When my theater is black
& the applause lighter than a deck
of falling cards
I weave an orchestra
from daffodil horns
& wild swamp reeds.

THE SEXPOT:

Men swirl my body, my body;
thrust themselves out to me
like cherry lipstick.
I take them all
inside my honeycombed tube,
spill my queenly scent
carelessly--
When the bees are too tired to dance
I cream myself
in silky anticipation.

THE GREEN WOMAN:

To protect myself--and you--
I speak in riddles, but
am really quite simple.
When the wind unshawls, I dance.
When the sun clings, I separate you
with many green hands.
In the wintering silence
I heal myself; I can thrust
my roots through stone
& the grooves of my skin
unfold like perpetual seawater.



DOREY SCHMIDT

THE REVEREND'S WIFE

Vanity, vanity, all is vanity – Ecclesiastes

Her hair was naturally curly
was the reason the reverend's wife said
it was a waste
to have a hair-do
at Bella's or Helen's
or Krystal's Koiffures.
Sometimes she had it cut--
just cut, not styled, please--
waiting patiently
to be worked in among
the "standing appointments"
planted like rows of curling lettuce
under the chromium hotcaps,
their diamond fingers rustling
the movie mag pages like leaves
in a farmer's almanac,
their rouged faces bright
as moon signs.
As soon as she was cut,
she hurried home.

There
 in the safe plainness
 of the white-tiled bath
 in her usual way
she kneaded 49¢ shampoo
into righteous lather
and washed any clinging impulses
 toward extravagance
right down the drain.

DOREY SCHMIDT

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

I am not your mother
just because I'm round
and melon breasts invite
the thump of curly heads.
Go away.
I don't need
your need for mothering.
You can't make me want
to take you on
with your rattling sack
of insecurities.
Use your own teeth
and spit out seeds of defiance.
Even if you think you want me,
if you can't see me
skipping rope
tossing my skirts higher and higher
sucking joy from play
like a lollipop,
if you want to get off
on me because you're scared
to grow up to grow old--
Don't.
I can't be your mother.
I'm looking for my own.

KARL ELDER

RECREATIONS

Life

and god said let there be light and in his arm waving exuberance knocked the whole damned box of kitchen matches off the stove tumbling through the trap door which erupted into millions of matches falling through the great shaft toward earth attached there on the wall of the universe where the box already lay since naturally it was heavier and the matches kept coming and there in the dark suddenly a spark and god said well i'll be.

Taxes

not only are butterflies free but the citizenry since it stands to reason graduated self-agrandizement is good and true because everyone knows capitalists own big black cars siezed by the shortage so that VW owners everywhere can afford the bowls where the State Marching Band of America rolls in the new year's hangman on the astro turf gee this is swell letters whole words out of human beings reading the spirit of seventy-six mommies and daddies gathered in the name of look at all that talent crying combine and conquer on the fifty yard line whiskers peeking out of panties releasing the firery baton straight up end-overendoverendoverendover gravity retarding progress climbing near the peak freeze frame.

Death

what a fan we have in Jesus that he makes it to all the games yelling your mother was a wishbone at the referees cheering the opposing teams when finally the officials can take it no longer entering the stands ripping him link from limb smashing the bones for the marrow though he has left his body behind to terrorize Andre Breton and Salvador Dali whose chocolate chessmen are melting in their hands not in their mouths chanting the janitor is sweeping the bastardly bones like pop corn from the isles while the fan keeps turning despite the ceremony of the unplugging.

Afterlife

where presidents submit voluntarily to polygraphs where there are eight by ten stills of every moment of your life on file where on the great and glorious day you are exposed masturbating before the masses where nightmares are only the beginning where in the end you are found to be a most amazing replica of that replica which is you and now and forever shall be despite your fervent desire to remain anonymous where "where" is a figment of your photographic mind which has for peanuts turned a trick and become a lone cell of the black mammoth so aptly described as the universe where you consider the life which is your death which is proof enough that after the afterlife there is no life where false advertising got its name where kleenex clouds floating cotton balls pearls pillars and promises

of a temperate climate are a euphemism
for absolute zero where personalities
are so perfect forty eleven may occupy
the point of a pin one point in a locus
of nowhere.

Space

some answers don't have questions mouths
the drowning fish yanked from the water
onto the bank gills going like a throbbing
cock praying air air everywhere
yet nary a molecule to drink flopping
over like a question mark to give it a
crack on the other side he hates the
land and suffers from fear of phobias
which have gathered around the fire
singing those old-timey tunes eating
their trout and whey when along comes a
rider out of the night slashing z's in the
seat of their consciousness tiny white
bones floating in their bodies entering
the blood stream shooting the frothing
rapids for the brain.

Time

god is great attendance is good this time of
the year and baked ham and candied yams
are even greater so that all over America
folding chairs are wiped clean arranged
to accomodate the many mana from heaven
descending upon a plague of come one come
all comes the tiger with a lily in his
teeth a hollow hungry growl from the stor-
age tanks scribbling on the john walls
all the road home for the holidays there
is no crisis like ours after such for-
giveness what knowledge?

DOREY SCHMIDT



DAPHNE McCOLL

CINDERELLA IN SAN DIEGO

In a dimly-lit dancehall
 down in San Diego
they danced the night away-
she and the handsome hidalgo.
He spoke softly in Spanish tones
while her eyes listened, enraptured,
 sparkling.

She danced with the young Mexican
 in her very best
 Arthur Murray style-
 remembered.

After midnight he whispered
 in soft Spanish tones,

 "We go tango,
 We to Tiajuana."

She left before dawnlight
taking her stray gray hairs
 and wrinkles with her
 before dawnlight
 before dawn-
 before light.

Now, years later, on the Rio Grande,
she tells the tale, the fairylike tale,
 of that night
 in San Diego

with a sparkle in Irish eyes
cowled under gray hair.

 One invisible slipper,
 glass slipper,
on her tiny foot sparkles, too, tapping
 a tango tune.

LAUREEN CHING

AUTUMNAL

Alone,
far from her chores of hogs
chickens and children tugging at her hem
Michigan farmwoman lies abed; warded
with her fellow sisters, convalescents all
from a cancer probe of the uterine wall.
Unflinching
Pioneer bred/stocked/tearless.
Nothing is comfortless
she reminds her visitors
of black and white gloom.
Moving day troubles.
Put a hundred down, she advises
and SEARS will deliver C.O.D.
1. a new refrigerator 2. an automatic
washer-dryer 3. a new color T.V.
4. a new stereo console.



LAUREEN CHING

MY FATHER

My father
was no blond Nazi
Jew killer.
Just a middle class tax man
Whitecollaring life,
A smiling stonefaced Chinaman.

On Sundays
He creamed the black leather
Exhorting the buff cloth
Snapping his dreams into shape
While my patent leather whites
Waited like loaves on a rack.

Family breadwinner
He kept his hidden cash
Stashed in a secret account
Like an embezzler enjoying
The spoils, alone.

Meanwhile,
His wife clipped coupons
And put up hems
And took them down
With pins stuck in her mouth.

And we five daughters
Crept around the edges of his life
Waiting for his throat to rasp,
Obeying the signs in his eyes:
Dead End.

LAUREEN CHING

COLLOQUY FOR WENDY

Side by side
we lie
just two women
curiously flattened
by the sunstoked lull of surf.
Low tide---
Sunday morning spawns
a somnambulant's
easy grace.

Womantalk:
the habitat
of homegrown cures
and maiden aunts.
You cultivate
a richer syllable.

Idle time
smoothing sand
from wrinkled tans.
We share a familiar symmetry
cleft of waist
dip of thigh.

The sea is our redemption, Wendy.
It brings us in
and draws us out.
Everything else
is just the water's slide
the moon's kick
the rock's root.

LAUREEN CHING

AT THE KASINO

For Mona

To find the color of the Nile
and satisfy the homefolks
curious of postcards
and postscripts scrawled
on aerograms,
you turn again
to the river.

A grey plume sits
in your mouth.
It is the feather of light.
Welcome it in silence.
Speak,
And it disappears.

Waters pale and darken.
First blood drawn into your cheeks.
You sip some wine
grow flushed
and wait.

What does the river
ever say
to these bones?
It sings an answer.
No symphony
No jazz
no hipgrinding sax
can recall.

You are Fellini's woman
dancing.
Smooth heron
rippling
across the pale screen.

RON STUBBLEFIELD

AMPUTEE

Steel traps, forgotten under
innocent sheets
of autumn leaves, grow rust. But
teeth are sharp
and seize a careless leg that
triggers jaws to feet
and snaps the smile of a possum
wide in disbelief.

His slack mind springs taut as
jaws show strength to gnaw
and sever steel from flesh. Soft
hisses then, metals creak
in rusted blood and rub the
spirit's bleeding calls
to steal a body free and make the
metal weak.

Mind metal hardens and the
spirit bites through one
leg's flesh and shuts the mocking
mouth upon itself.

MICHAEL CALVELLO

END OF OCTOBER

a constant staring
at the edge of trees,
birds tip the leaves
salvaging fingers of dirt,
straw to suck the holes
in the earth

the pure bone gleams in the ground,
the moon spins through air
and lovers grasp the light
in the corners
of their folded skin

the name on the headstone is gone,
the carved letters
fade in the cold

seasons split the grass blade apart,
a last sun
falls on transparent leaves,
a gold film covers the field,
the hard pumpkin,
growing large and round,
is ready
for the knives.
the wide grin
burns in the mouth,
drops the seed
through the belly of time

ROBERT DeMARIA

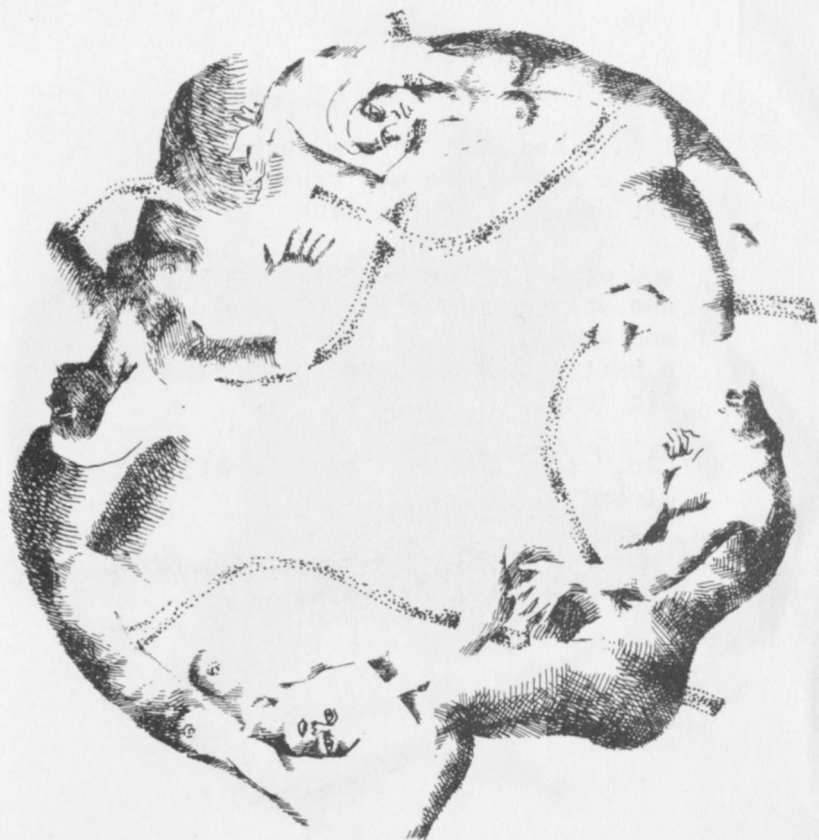
THE WINTER SOLSTICE

Death and renewal,
The icy point on which we pivot,
Participating in the journeys of kings
Across the wastelands of winter
Towards the star-marked stable
Rich with dung and new life.

Here, too, the seasons die and then begin.
Snow falls in the small hours
And the grass is white
Against the quiet raving of the trees
And over the sleeping feast
Of stones and silent citizens.

The sun pauses in the North.
Suddenly there are no birds.
A stillness grips the woods.
Death is the seed.
The amorous corpse of the world
Opens its closing eyes.

NANCY PRINCE



cycle 2

RONALD KOERTGE

"DON'T ORDER WITHOUT ME,"

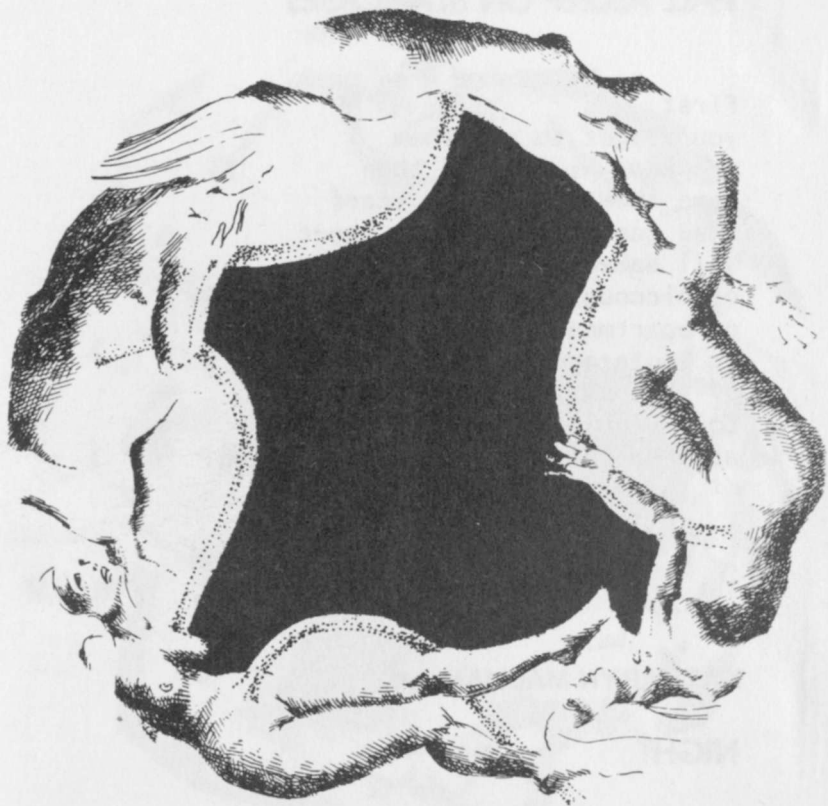
I said and went to the bathroom
where an old man was brushing
his dentures in the sink

and scouring his feet with pumice
and shaving his arms and legs
and scrubbing his intestines with
a bottle brush and wringing out
his lungs.

"So," said the waitress, "what'll
it be?"

"Water," I said tearing up the menu,
"all the water you've got."

NANCY PRINCE



cycle 3

KATHARYN MACHAN AAL

MCALISTAIR'S FORMULA FOR GETTING KANGAROOS TO FALL ASLEEP ON STAIRCASES

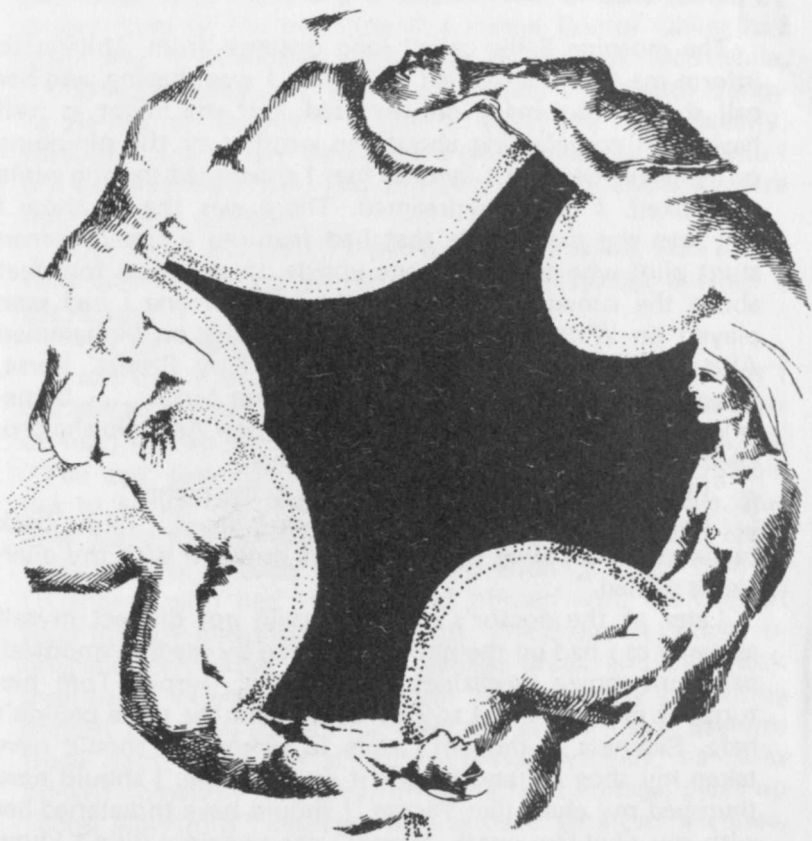
First
you've got to get them
drunk on highballs, then
lead them quietly (a scarf
tied gently around the snout
will dampen the noise
of hiccoughs) to the homes
or apartment houses
or isolated little flats
of the people you want to scare
to screaming hell
at eight o'clock the next morning.

KATHARYN MACHAN AAL

NIGHT

Moon like a bloodfat spider
crawled into the sky
hung there counting stars like flies
and spun the clouds away

NANCY PRINCE



cycle 4

TED DANIEL

NOT BEARS OR TARZANS

The morning Sallie called long distance from Abilene to inform me that she wanted a divorce, I was shaving, and her call should have made me very sad. But she might as well have been complaining about the weather or the plumbing or hangnails because I ignored her. I continued shaving while she talked. I even daydreamed. There was the air show I had seen the day before that had featured a crazy woman stunt pilot who flew her plane upside down a mere four feet above the runway. There was the hole in one I had seen played on Wide World of Sports, the wire on Mohammed Ali's broken jaw, an old joke about Roy Rogers' horse, Trigger, firebombs, crabs, syphilis, peanut butter . . . Somewhere between Trigger and a whore in San Antonio she proclaimed her undying love for another man.

"I love him," she blurted, "You keep the plane."

"Darling," I said in my natural Texas drawl, "I'll be back to handle everything right after this problem with my allergies is settled."

Later at the doctor's office, I could not distract myself as easily as I had on the phone, not even by reading smudged, page-torn movie magazines. Even fuzzy, peeping-Tom pictures of our ex-First Lady sunbathing in the nude couldn't help. Sickness, I thought, leads to sickness. I should have taken my shoe off and beaten it on the table. I should have thumped my chest like Tarzan. I should have threatened her with my God-like wrath. Damn -- she certainly didn't know what she was throwing out the window.

I was a graduate from the Air Force Academy and Vietnam and there was plenty to be proud of. Hell, I flew airplanes! The French mirage 4 delta wing, the Northrop 5A "Shoki Tiger," McDonald F4B Phantom, LTV Corsair were to me like merit badges are to an eaglescout. Once I had even flown a rejuvenated Messerschmidt 109. Had Sallie forgotten all that? I'd donated thousands to the Heart Fund but now mine was breaking.

Overnight, it seemed, my life disintegrated, and the allergies . . . I had 170 test scratches on my back, bruises from two intradermals, one pricked and sore finger, a latent asthmatic condition and a weakening heart. Even my testicles ached. I had three false teeth and a horrible case of acne caused by greasy food or the medicine this insane Doctor Olikier had given me. I considered myself to be Normal. Meanwhile, 1,000 miles away, my wife was rubbing knees with Benny or Barney or Bugsby -- I hadn't caught the name exactly, Bobby? I finally left the doctor's office in a rush. Where to I did not exactly know. The airport at least. Transitions were now horribly difficult.

"Oh, what the hell!" I blurted to a surprised Taxi driver who was taking me to the airport, "I'll handle it when I get home."

"Yes, sir," he said, "I'm sure you will."

I left him a substantial tip and then savaged my hat as I got out of the cab. I've always been a bit tall 6'3" as a matter of fact, but so what? Sallie's 5'9". Tall Texans Ha. Ha. Ha. "You ever play basketball, son?" I have made up incredible lies in answer to that question, absolutely incredible. But now Sallie was whittling me down. Chop, chop, hack, hack, I thought of a joke I once heard about a crazy man in Oklahoma who had rehabilitated himself with the help of drug therapy and shock treatments. The drugs he bought indiscriminately from his own teenage brats, and the shock treatments he rigged up himself one night by hot-wiring himself to a wall socket. So, who can afford insane asylums these days? Who can afford anything? Anyway, he cures himself somehow this way, finds the right voltage, picks up "good vibrations" perhaps, who knows? Whatever the case, he's cured see; so he calls his wife who had had the good sense to leave him many years before these experiments started. No matter, he convinces her to return to him because now he's sane you see, and she does return, not having learned her lesson well enough it seems. Just as she walks into the house a mirror he's looking into falls off the wall, and he stops combing his hair and starts bawling and ranting and raving and blowing his mind all over again. Now wait a minute, here comes the punch line; she says whatza matta honey? And he says real sad like and heartbroken, Oh shucks; I was

so happy to get my head straightened out, and now it's gone and fallen clean off! Ha. Ha. Ha.

Sometimes when people ask me how tall I am, I tell them jokes like this one.

I'm strapped into my pilot's seat by this time, after having notified the tower, and I'm mechanically clicking off the checklist. I uncoil the rubber cords of my head set, but then, distracted, I gaze off toward Texas, south that is, and home, thinking about what a sorry joker I really am and trying to forget the ugly truth at the same time, like a bank robber who knows he's being captured alive by hidden cameras even while he's robbing the bank.

"Surprise! You and your robbery are on Candid Camera!"

Altimeter, fuel, oil, compass, lights, etc. The checklist, like an old friend distracts me momentarily, and my pride returns briefly like a dinner guest after a forgotten hat. I swig from a fancy suede-wrapped flask and drown my bad mood. Self-pity I tell myself is unmanly. I test my double ignition, I fasten my seat belt a little tighter, I snap the ear-phones on my head. To my left, an Aero Commander, 500 A propeller begins to whine. To the right whines its mate. I test my wing flaps. I am an aluminum alloy with my plane. I hum. Down the runway I go and up. Up the landing gear. Up. Off to Sallie. Up, up and away!

With or without my sanity I soar off through bourbon colored clouds.

Is it Billy? No it is not. It is bennies swallowed by the handful with a bourbon chaser. It is outright defiance of doctor's orders. It is liquor and drugs and English walnuts and cabbage and blue grass and tobacco and eggs and milk and bread and fur and sunflowers; hair oil, hair dye, lettuce, oranges, asparagus, wool and pollen. I am at 8,000 feet and climbing. Perhaps I'll climb right into outer space and go into orbit. I have become, it seems, allergic to the planet.

Now Sallie is with me. She is lounging on a cloud with whats-his-name who has turned into a golden eagle.

"Guess what," she says, "the great ace pilot well he is practically an invalid. Poor Tommy. The doctor says he can't

drink or smoke or anything. Why, I am even afraid to sleep with him anymore. We might stir up a bunch of house dust, and he might start coughing. Ha. No. I mean from the dust, silly, Ha. Ha."

And he says:

"Sallie, my bitch, my favorite flower, my frumpy, humpy love, my fragrant love-stuff, my sweetest skin tickly, prickle of my loins, my secret tongue, my love."

And I say:

"Sallie, with your moles and long black hair, your tan smooth skin and green eyes. Sallie, with your special way of making love in the shower, the spray turned on cold and hot, and you wadding the pink, plastic curtain in your hand. You stretch one leg half up the yellow tile. Later at the Ft. Worth zoo just past the giraffe stink and before the bird smell -- the "prehistoric" horse, Tarpan his name, who spread his hind legs, doffed his tail and peed. You gawked and clawed the wire fence, and you wished I had a foot long penis like him because when we got to the car, you wanted me horse fashion, your horse-lover. Sweet brandied love.

In the middle of all that a happy bald-headed man taps me on the shoulder and says, "Smile, you and your divorce are on Candid Camera!"

There are no transitions. But there was a bear once. Yes, a bear. One that I flew all the way to Colorado to hunt. A huge black bear whose paw print spanned eight inches and whose intestinal fortitude knew no limits. Anyhow, once I tracked a bear in Colorado, and one night he doubled back and invaded my camp. He ate an entire chuckbox full of supplies while I trembled cravenly in my tent, listening. In the morning I tracked him again; that is, I followed his droppings. I found whole plastic bags, Brillo pads, an unopened can of fruit cocktail, a pencil, a bar of soap, cellophane, tooth picks, assorted splinters, and only a little blood. He had passed it all indiscriminately it seems, perhaps making some unspoken comment on the artifacts of this great, sophisticated civilization we all live in. Now isn't that something? If he could have talked -- in a Walt Disney fairy tale for example -- I wonder what he would have said about divorce.

It was a miserable flight, I can't deny it. I landed in Abe-line that day around noon, made bear tracks to the La Dee Dah Country Club and hung around there for a while breaking my diet to the tune of four double boilermakers in a row. Then I skulked home and confronted nobody at all. I kept on breaking my diet. If it was allergen, I drank it. But I never passed out, and Sallie never appeared. Buddy or whoever had evidently already helped her move out. The lawyers would notify me later no doubt. The next day I rented a T.V., sat in the middle of an empty room and watched everything -- football games, give away shows, soap operas, family shows, situation comedies, Police Story -- nothing made any sense. I felt like a Kama Kazi pilot who's run out of ammunition, or I felt like a bear who's finally tried to eat live bullets. In short, I felt shot down.

That I would have to confront Sallie and her new man finally seemed inconsequential, even trite. What was there to say after all? Who was there to blame? And what did it matter? Hadn't this story been worked out in a million T.V. scripts already, and hadn't all the variations of this story already played at the movie theaters and drive-ins throughout the world? And think of the books! Whatever new under the sun could we all have to say to each other in such a scene? And, if through some careless madness we did find an original line or two while we suffered our last scene together, what purpose would we serve?

For awhile I considered flying back to Oklahoma and hiring on as a cropduster for some flea-bitten company that enjoys flying low and playing hide and seek with telephone poles. There was always flying. And escape. Why, after all, couldn't I just skip the obligatory goodbyes altogether?

Did I have to be a gentleman about it? Did I have to play my part? But, of course, the escape scene had been played a few times, too, now that I came to think about it. So also the fight scene between jealous husband and wifey's lover. Also, heart-broken husband and hateful lover and triumphant husband; also heart-broken wifey, heartbroken husband and heartbroken lover. By this time I needed a computer. Finally, I decided the task was impossible, so I simply sat hyped-up

in front of the T.V. for a few days and drank homemade boilermakers. I sat as I imagine it now not quite like a zombie, but getting really zinged and oddly conscious of myself like I was watching a person who had absolutely nothing more to offer that would suit his particular situation at his particular time. I was Walter Cronkite without sound. I was Archie Bunker; I was a little man with a top hat dancing in a toilet bowl; I was the White Tornado and McCloud all rolled up into one. I was Johnny Carson without sound, endlessly antic. I was free sailing in the slowest glider that ever flew. And if Sallie did return for the great confrontation scene, I am sure that she found one strange bird. My head as the man said had fallen clean off.

Now, I am writing this to re-establish my connections. I am dressed in the normal manner, and I am not confined in an insane asylum. In fact, I help Doctor with his patients. His name is Wilcox, and he says he's seen my type several times before. He says we all tell pretty much the same story, about sudden divorces or car accidents or different, assorted, unexpected shocks and the like, which trigger our temporarily aberrant behavior. He says we all usually return to normal after a few months of quiet and rest and counseling. The divorce, Doctor says, requires patience and understanding from everyone involved. Those worst affected like myself simply need to "re-establish their usual connections with our fast changing society," eventually even to the point where we consider marriage again and so starting all over with another, "normal domestic situation."

I'll tell you right now and unconditionally, that's one adjustment I'm in no hurry to make, not for a few months yet and maybe not even when Doctor says I'm ready. If I've learned anything at all from my divorce, it's to avoid dangerous transitions. Watch your altimeters, boys and cling to old connections. Above all, listen. After all, we are all humans here, not bears or Tarzans.

BETSY COLQUITT

CUPTOWELS

hanging in the sun
their past sings through:
the feed-sack dye
of Plymouth rocks
cackling history
fabled as their being:

shrunk of their seeds
and raveled of three-thread seams,
sacks, washed and sunned
and beatified by lye,
cedared mothless months
awaiting translation to treasure:
prints for shirtwaists of copious hems
and for bonnets for babies
who might melt under sun:
and the scraps always saved
to patchwork as quilts
for millennial everydays:

domestics, though, still told
their lowly tales,
dye engraving their legend,
and their destiny, plebian
and inevitable as drudgery,
was cuptowels:

these hang now
remnantly
amid my wash:

telling how one sycamored afternoon
swinging leisure of her porch
she bordered sack cloths

with cross-stitch, threaded
busy Dutch girls on, and almost
transfigured native yards
to fables of Netherlandish being
except for dyes of these triumphant hens
never purged from seeing:

now on lines bedecked of polyesters
anonymous as detergents,
these hens beyond all lyeing
parade as mighty shades
bloodless and real
over stitched and fabulous being,

and summon by their keening shapes
marvel and life of all tumular story.

BETSY COLQUITT

COLETTE AT PERE LACHAISE

'At last someone who speaks French'--
Colette, of a cat in America

the day becomes the place
gray rain washing alleys of tombs
where grave families lie
garlanded most lastingly
with leaves, monuments
gone awry.

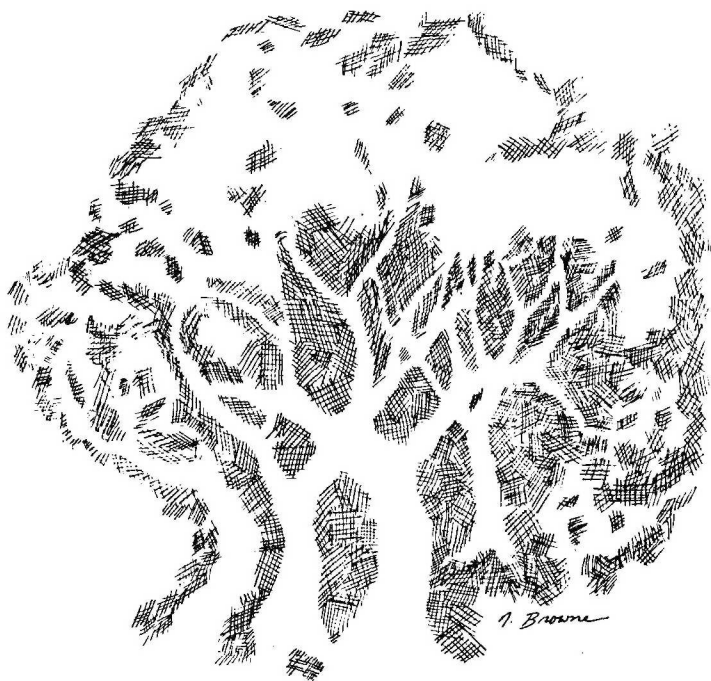
this day encourages few walkers
only us and a custodian or two
raking most demanding debris
and there are cats, sitting
still as marble on the marbles
or dashing, rain too much,
toward shelter -- where?
I move my mind from wandering.

and we find her solitary place:
ici repose Colette.
dates are given
nothing more except a cat
gray as the day
and eternal as leaves
who watches us with cunning
and does not speak:

speaks though as to her
scratchy crooning language
crafty as French
of cat to lover. better
than monument this cat
guards her
and requires no witness
not us certainly

to its fitting presence

but only her lying
in love of leaf-meal
witless repose.



NORM BROWNE

BETSY COLQUITT

REDUCED CIRCUMSTANCES

the barbering's skillful--
that can be said for it:
a lock gone there, a follicle here
sealed sure as tomb
against re-being; and the color,
brown gone white so goldenly
I hardly saw it:
eyes neither what they were.

all things considered
it's been a dexterous manicuring,
nails hardening at rates
beyond clear filing away,
and the muscle tone washed to fat
on shores of fatigue
so plush and sleepy
I never even noticed:

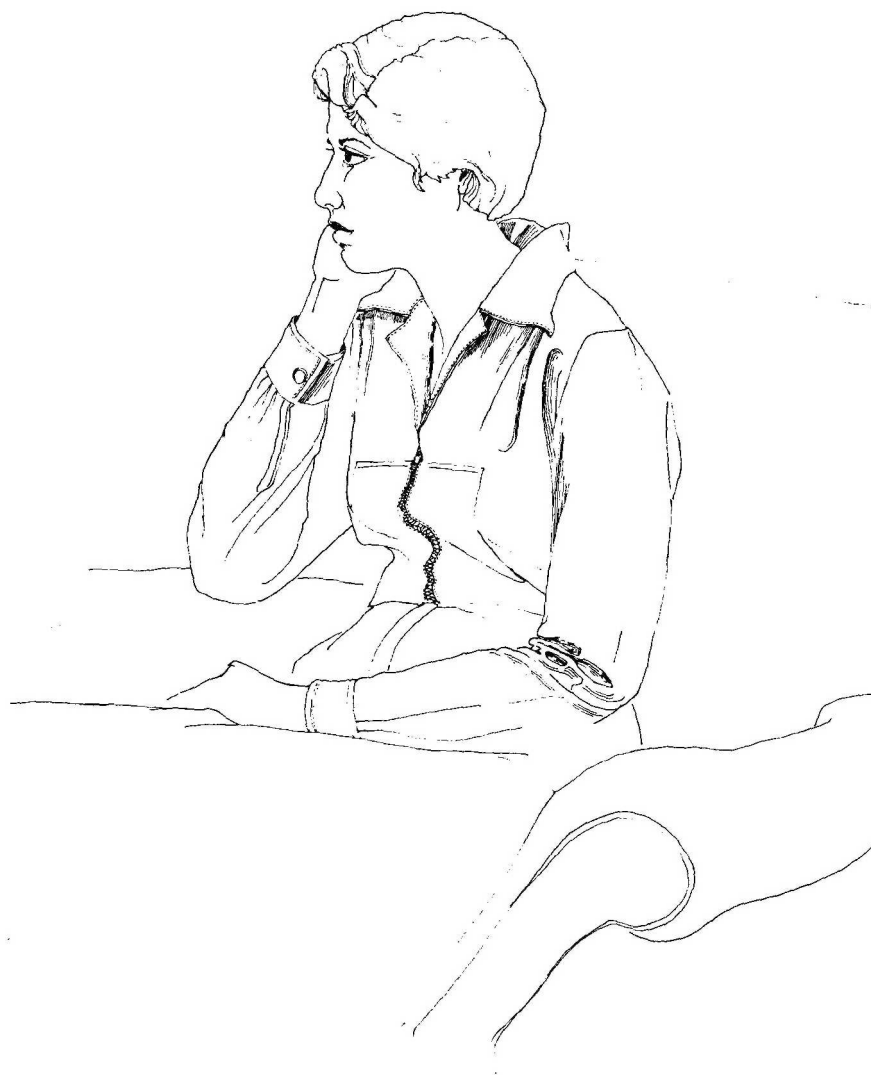
but I do:
random sight reflected
in department store window:
and am suddened to shock
beyond any buying
at how my credits are gone.

What happened
and when that this
is me:

debauched to reduction
in circumstances that optimist
I, always slouchy in spine,
could not on darkest day
have imagined:

and this day is bright.

NANCY PRINCE



JAN SEALE

ART IN THE BOONIES

Each week when the *New Yorker* comes to our house in McAllen, Texas, one son marvels at the simplicity of the cover art, another laughs over the reprinted bloopers with their editorial rejoinders, my husband checks major musical events we missed, and I note what plays we might have attended and read the poetry. The cartoons promote family unity -- we band together to try, with our agrarian roots, to understand the urban innuendoes.

If our town had a 144th street, it would be in the middle of the King Ranch, or five miles out in the Gulf of Mexico. Communicating by mail with the outside world means mailing a letter before the only daily dispatch at 6 p.m.

All this is to set the stage for wondering how art can flourish in such remoteness. Without trying to set up what would be a specious argument for the superiority of boonie art over big-city establishment art, I'd like to say a little in defense of art and artist in the American hinterlands.

First, it is not a decadent art we make. It may be naive, rustic, regional to the point of provincial, but it is not washed out. We don't yet write many stories about writers writing stories they don't want to write. Artists in the boonies don't seem to be very interested in cities built over ruins. Here in Texas at least, the sky and the earth and the basic natures of people still preoccupy the poets, writers, and painters. In the case of our particular south Texas area, the small towns have only been settled fifty years. We have no overlay of literati or high society to cater to.

The subjects we can choose from -- at least externally -- are fresh and untried. I have a hunch -- and it's only that -- that sometime after *Main Street* and *Our Town*, the American reader got the message that a story set in the Bronx had more literary merit than a story set in Waxahachie, Texas. Of course, you can show me how wrong I am by whipping out Larry McMurtry and Willie Morris, but one has to ask if they are a trend or a phenomenon.

Second, we are never surfeited with art. True, we may wallow briefly in self-pity at our lack of opportunities when we get our *New Yorkers*, but that act is natural for all human grazers who see greener grass beyond the fence. The only-ness of our museum, our symphony, our magazine makes them uniquely ours. We're free to throw our art, time, and money into them without agonizing over rival institutions. We're never fragmented by multiplicity, overwhelmed or dulled by choices. The only decision is whether to do anything.

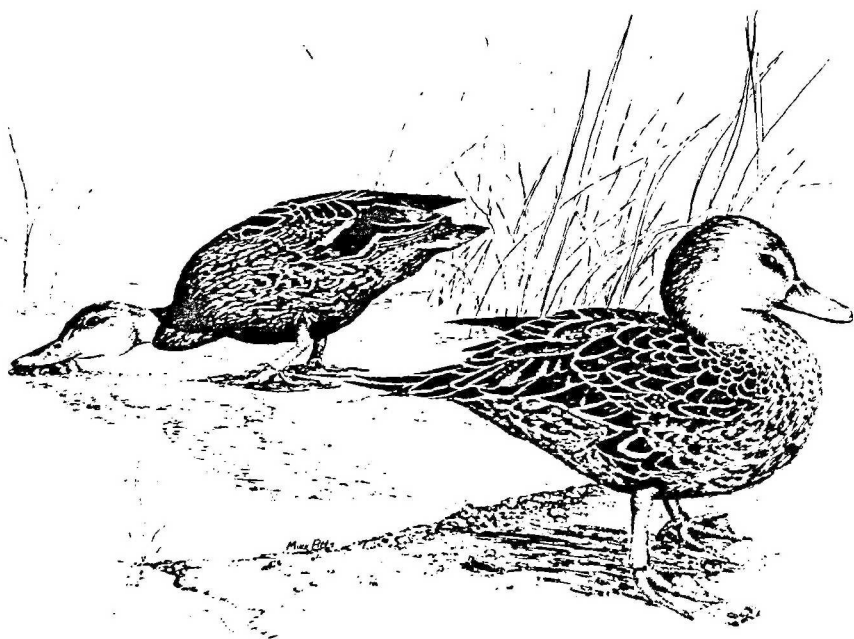
That is not to say we lack enough to do. Even in our isolated area of only 50,000 or so, we can go out almost every evening to a cultural event if we have the time and desire. Dance program, art exhibit, chamber concert, play, recital poetry reading -- we can be there in ten minutes; we can usually take our children; the cost is little or nothing.

Finally, if we miss being in the mainstream of culture and art, we also miss some of the hazards of urban living. Each morning when I rise at 5:30 to write, the setting moon and stars wait unbelievably aglitter in the unpolluted south Texas sky outside my study window. One afternoon last spring, my husband conducted an opera matinee at 1:00 and was home knocking about in his garden by 4:00. We spend less than thirty minutes a day commuting to our jobs. The pace is slow but the atmosphere allows concentration and reflection.

Perhaps our peace exacts its price in anonymity. If we could keep our boonie existence and find wider recognition as well, that would be fine. We miss the "contacts" with publishers, promoters, like-minded artists the big city could offer.

But part of the fun of art in the boonies must be the do-it-yourself nature of it. As one local artist put it, it's like sculpting a stone you've quarried yourself rather than bought from the stone dealer. We get to do fairly much whatever we like and we're well appreciated, if not entirely understood, by the townspeople.

So this arting in the boonies is a kind of compromise, with long odds at ever achieving fame but a rather good chance for quality living here and now. Still, I can't really feel too bad about the gamble. After all, there was Emily Dickinson in little Amherst, D. H. Lawrence on the Dodge ranch in New Mexico, and Tolstoy on a farm in Russia.



MIKE PITTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH W. D. SNODGRASS

The following brief interview was taped by *riverSedge* editors, with the permission of W. D. Snodgrass, on October 21, 1977, in a Mexican cafe in McAllen, Texas. The Pulitzer Prize winning poet, who had read his poems including portions of his newest work, *The Fuhrer Bunker*, to a large audience at Pan American University the evening before, now offered an autocriticism of that work, as well as comments on self-publication and small presses.

SCHMIDT: In relation to *The Fuhrer Bunker*, I have wondered if there are or were political implications in your writing on that particular topic? I mean, these people of the German high command, who directly caused millions of deaths and uncountable suffering, are treated by you with more human compassion than they are generally afforded. Is this an attempt to demythicize these people -- to show that precisely because they were human, the dangers of their excesses are everpresent? Perhaps even in some of our own political activities?

SNODGRASS: I guess I would partly hope that, but that's a kind of extra-literary component. And, as you know, people misuse anything when they can, and will probably misunderstand and use it for the wrong purposes anyway. Because their purposes are different from yours.

DANIEL: You didn't intend it as any sort of lesson in political science.

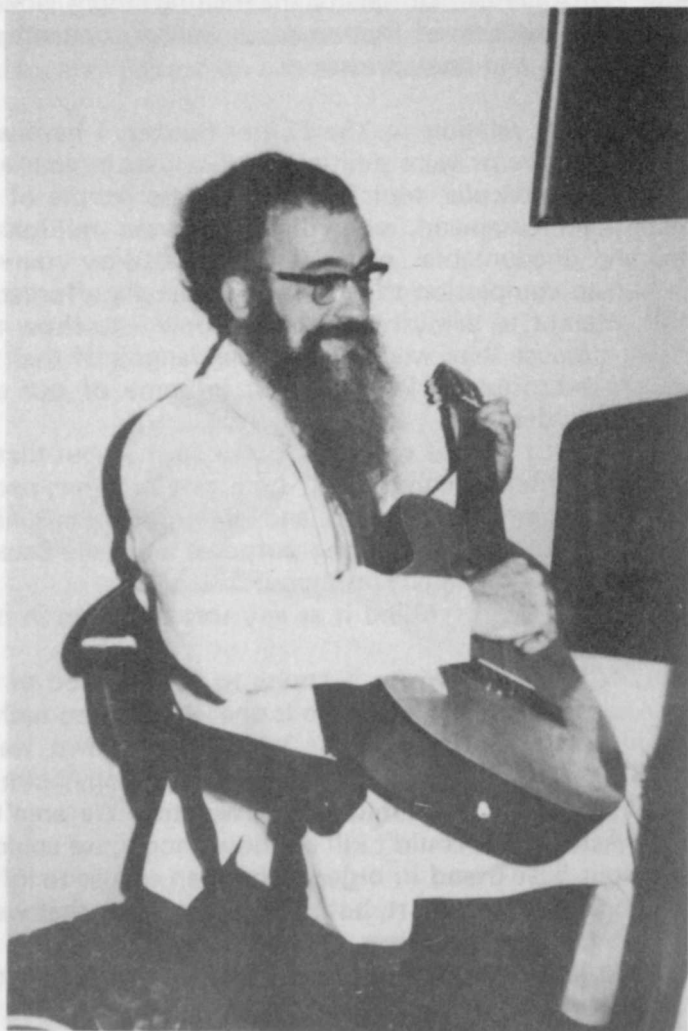
SNODGRASS: No. I wrote it trying to write a kind of tragedy. And usually the tragic hero is one who does something absolutely awful, but something which deep down we all want to do, so we admire him enormously. We envy him because he goes past the limits where we stop. We aren't as awful as Achilles; we couldn't kill all those people; we couldn't sacrifice our best friend in order to have an excuse to kill all those people. We stop short, but there's something that wants to do all the terrible things. So you admire that guy, the tragic hero, a lot, in spite of yourself, at the same time that you execrate him.

ROBERTSON: But from a distance, for people to dismiss Hitler and the others in the bunker, the cast in the tragedy, as being something other than human is easier.

SNODGRASS: Yeah, but that seems to me a very dangerous thing to do.

ROBERTSON: So you are bringing them back in an attempt to show they were human beings, not mutants.

SNODGRASS: I was attacked once at a reading for that very thing. A man who had been in the camps, and his family had been in the camps, said, "How dare you humanize these people!" And all I could say was: "Don't blame me for that--



God did that." They were human, and since then we have been seeing more and more that we are capable of doing practically all those things under less pressure than the German were. And if we investigate the backgrounds of those officers who destroyed villages and burned their entire populations in the church, we find that they were all good family men who had high ideals, and had made many sacrifices for this cause in which they believed, and suddenly they found themselves taking this next step and doing these unthinkable things.

ROBERTSON: Then, although the immediate setting of *The Fuehrer Bunker* is World War II, it is not really about World War II, but about people.

SNODGRASS: You sure aren't going to get any fight out of me with that statement. You're right -- at least, I hope you're right.

ROBERTSON: In talking with other people about poetry, the idea of self-publishing is often discussed. Admittedly, there is no criteria for quality; anyone who's got a hundred bucks or two hundred bucks can put together a book of poems -- which in the long run may be worse for poetry. What is your opinion, Mr. Snodgrass?

SNODGRASS: I don't know that I have any opinion about it. I don't think I would do it. Generally speaking, when you see someone publish something by themselves, you assume that it's not going to be very good. But that may not be right; I think Archie Ammons published his first book. But, generally speaking, you call it the *vanity* press, and you assume that that's the case. There are exceptions, though, as I mentioned.

ROBERTSON: But you know some of the frustrations of the person trying to write, trying to get published, finding fewer and fewer markets in which his or her work will be widely circulated.

SNODGRASS: I don't think that's so. Now, there are so many magazines that I know it isn't at all like when I was young, when there were really only a very few; now, there are a million magazines -- although most of them are printing absolute garbage because that's all there is if you're going to have that many publications. I really do think that anyone who wants to be published can be. Even though your work is better than the stuff that's getting published, you probably

can get it published. You just have to keep sending it out, and of course that is frustrating and annoying, but I don't know what alternative there is to it. If you publish your own book, nobody's going to see that anyway. And one of the reasons to print things in a magazine is to impress a book publisher with what publications you have, but a vanity press publication probably won't impress them.

ROBERTSON: Well, publication has always been attempted because the writer knows he's good, but it's always a question of whether someone else thinks you're good. Are you saying then that quality will always get published, if the writer is persistent? If he has something really great, it will get published somewhere?

SNODGRASS: No, not necessarily. It's going to be harder for it to get published than something that's mediocre.

DANIEL: Which do you think are the best small presses?

SNODGRASS: I don't know -- I don't keep up with that at all. I like the guy who did *The Fuehrer Bunker*.

It seems to me he's doing some marvelous stuff, and he's got a lovely set-up there, where he's doing the two books together, the known and the unknown poet. That seems to be very good. But, again, I don't keep up with small presses -- I don't need to.

SCHMIDT: That's an enviable position for a writer, especially a poet. Thank you for talking with us for *riverSedge*.



JODY ALIESAN

NO REASON FOR CONCERN

I hear the weather's changing.
It's been a dry fall,
the lake is down a foot.
The day the radiation cloud came over
was clear, we were lucky then
it didn't rain. Experts said
no reason for concern but
should precipitation occur
don't eat anything in your garden.

I eat my soup and bread
paying attention to them,
wondering if someday
I'll remember this as a feast.

I thought getting older
one found comfort
in the clouds moving by, seasons
turning. Now the clouds
carry death, innocent of it.
Looking out at the trees
I am surprised with sobbing,
ashamed of my kind.

LILLIE D. CHAFFIN

THE HERITAGE

Standing in the doorway,
I heard the fire, saw the firing,
and the man toppling the fence
into our yard. They carried
him off to the hospital, Papa followed
for getting bail. I was three years old.
At any toppling now, I smell
whiskey and violence.

2.

At four, I woke to Mama begging
to be left alone, to her falling
out of bed, then dancing as he shot
six times at her feet. Inside my head,
at any popping sound,
we are dancing still.

3.

Tapering off on whiskey, he walked
the floor, whistled, and sang
until the bottle won, and he rampaged,
cursing, breaking furniture, threatening lives.
I wished him dead a hundred times.
A hundred times since his death, I've wished
him alive, believing that somehow
now I could find reasons for the misery
we called a family.

4.

Tantalyzed by violence
magnetized closer to it,

I clamp a seal on it, hear storms
gushing, sway with the lashing,
go silent for cooling, hear-said
I'm a pouter. Some are sorry for that
without knowing the alternative.

BRIAN ROBERTSON

STILL LIFE

small town
silent around the square
we're standing under
some dead sign
the police roll by once
and then roll by again
wishing we'd
kick in a window
or set the gutter on fire
anything
they're tired

i've got a phone number
in my pocket
a copper penny
in my hand
a hole
in my left shoe
one cigarette
in a wilted pack

at the hotel
the all night cable
is showing vampire movies
the trucker in the next room
has scored a dream cushion
named margie he's shouting
something over and over

i've got a quarter
for the vibra bed
a newspaper
from a week ago

a cracked
plastic ice bucket
one eighteen year old girl
with a warped guitar

the rain's falling
on the highway
morning might forget
to stop here
i'm tired
come here
now

the vampire bites his victim
the trucker's door opens
and closes

at last
my dreams unwind
like a spool
of bright blue thread

BILL CRIDER

I.

In sleep I browse my dream-changed past
And glide down strangely altered streets,
By wooden houses painted white,
With sprinklers waving in their yards
Where nothing moves but water,
Falling through the sun.

People stand like statues,
Immobile in the amber light:
The boy I was, the friends I knew,
Their faces smiling upward,
As if they knew a secret
Which is not mine to share.

II.

I wake in ropes of flowered sheets,
Fumbling thoughts of things now gone,
Knowing that I must rise once more,
To meet my mirrored morning face,
Become the man I am.

BILL CRIDER

PLASTIC XMAS

Underneath my plastic tree
Are plastic presents wrapped with glee
And plastic tape, as you can see.
Nearby there's a nativity
(Made of plastic, naturally)
With its plastic babe fast asleep,
Watched over by placid plastic sheep,
And plastic shepherds that quietly creep,
As plastic angels from the rooftop peep.

Beside it stand my plastic wife...
My plastic children...
My plastic life.

BILL CRIDER

AFTERNOON CLASS

In a room grown dim with lemon light
I read aloud omnivorous lines
To students holding soft-drink cans,
Cigarette ashes in their laps,
Digesting their lunches with half-closed eyes.

Nothing moves the motey air
Except my murmuring voice.

Outside an unwashed window I see
A small brown lizard on a ledge,
Frozen by the slanting sun
In easy immobility.
His life throbs faintly in this throat
(Whatever life there is),
And yet he does not move.

Inside the room my voice drones on,
While unmoved students nod.
We are nearly like the lizard, but
We do not throb.

contributors

KATHARYN MACHAN AAL teaches at Tompkins Cortland Community College and has appeared in *Cedar Rock* and *13th Moon*. JODY ALIESAN was featured poet in *riverSedge* 2, where her poem "No Reason For Concern" was mislabeled. It is reprinted here with corrections and apologies. NORM BROWNE teaches art at Pan American University and recently published an article on art and nature farms in *Trends*. MICHAEL CALVELLO has a book of poetry, *Triangular Man* (Place of Herons Press 2404 Riverside Farms, Austin, Tx) LILLIE CHAFFIN edits and writes, a frequent contributor to the small press network. LAUREEN CHING is the featured poet this issue. She lives in Honolulu, Hawaii and is one of the best of the new poets. BILL CRIDER teaches at Howard Payne University in Brownwood, Texas. BETSY COLQUITT is the editor of *Descant* from TCU in Ft. Worth. TED DANIEL is coeditor of *riverSedge* and has several poems forthcoming in *Poetry * Texas*. ROBERT DEMARIA edits *Mediterranean Review*. BARRY DEMPSTER has most recently appeared in *Cedar Rock* and is busy editing a book entitled *Tributaries*. KARL ELDER edits *SEEMS* and has contributed to *riverSedge* in the past. GLORIA HERRERA is a talented art student at Pan American University. RONALD KOERTGE'S books include *Men Under Fire* and *12 Photographs of Yellowstone*. BARBARA LEFCOWITZ publishes widely and works with the writer's community in Washington. DAPHNE McCOLL is a resident of the Rio Grande Valley and has lived in New York where she wrote for various outlets. MIKE PITTS is an Arizona artist who has visited the Texas valley. NANCY PRINCE is head of the art department at Pan American University and exhibits in national art shows on a regular basis. BRIAN ROBERTSON has just released a book of poems, *The Appointment* through Blind Alley Press.

DOREY SCHMIDT, *riverSedge* co-editor, has had poems accepted by *Buckle* and *Phantasm*. JAN SEALE won a writing contest at the Southwest Writer's Rally in San Antonio as well as having recent poems in *Nitty Gritty* and serving as Rocky Mountain MLA Poetry Chairman for 1977. RON STUBBLEFIELD'S work has appeared in numerous magazines across the country. W. D. SNODGRASS is currently teaching at Syracuse University and is the author of *Heart's Needle*, which won the 1960 Pulitzer Prize. His most recent book is *The Fuhrer Bunker*, published by BOA Editions, 92 Park Avenue Brockport, NY 14420.

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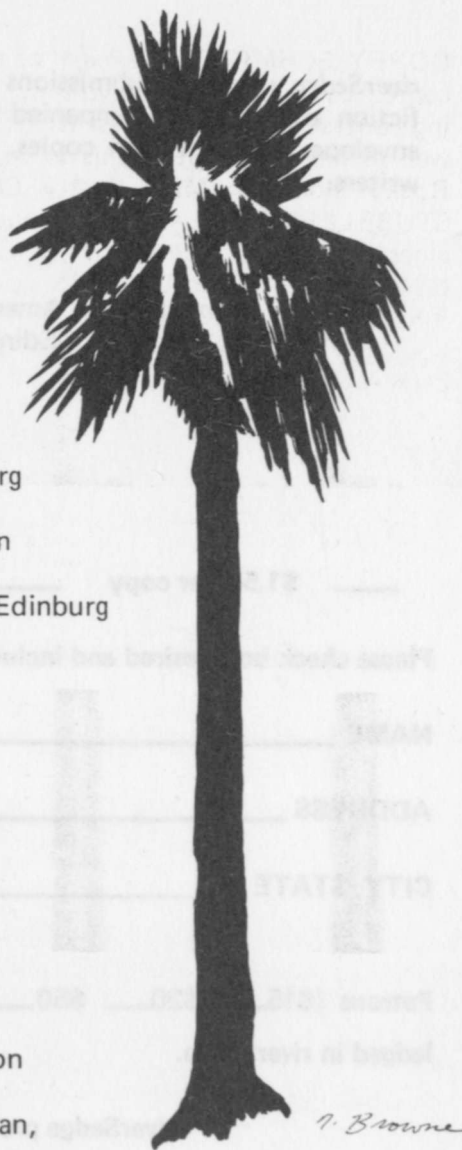
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